

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

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AMCONSUL OPORTO

C O N F I D E N T I A L LISBON 378

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELAB, PINT, PO,

SUBJ: COUNCIL OF MINISTERS ENDS DEBATE ON LABOR LAW

REF: LISBON 350

SUMMARY: COUNCIL OF MINISTERS ENDS DEBATE ON UNITARY LABOR LAW
WHICH NOW GOES TO COUNCIL OF STATE FOR FINAL APPROVAL. END
SUMMARY.

1. COUNCIL OF MINISTERS HAS CONCLUDED DEBATE ON THE DECREE-LAW
WHICH WILL IMPOSE A UNITARY STRUCTURE ON PORTUGAL'S LABOR
MOVEMENT. ALTHOUGH THE OFFICIAL COMMUNIQUE ON THE MEETING DID
NOT SPECIFICALLY STATE THAT THE MEASURE WAS APPROVED, THE COUNCIL
HAD EARLIER APPROVED THE GENERAL PROVISIONS OF THE LAW, THUS
LIMITING THE MODIFICATIONS WHICH COULD BE MADE AS A RESULT OF
SUBSEQUENT DEBATE. (REFTEL).

2. THE VOTE WITHIN THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS IS BELIEVED TO
HAVE BEEN CLOSE. CONSIDERED TO HAVE OPPOSED THE DECREE ARE
MINISTERS ALMEIDA SANTOS, SALGADO ZENHA, SILVA LOPES, RUI VILAR,
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MARIO SOARES, MARIA LOURDES PINTASILGO, AND MAGALHAES MOTA.

BELIEVED TO HAVE VOTED FOR THE LAW WERE THE FIVE MILITARY MINISTERS, PLUS FERNANDES, AND CUNHAL. PRIME MINISTER GONCALVES IS REPUTED TO HAVE CAST THE TIE-BREAKING VOTE IN FAVOR OF THE DECREE. THE LAW NOW GOES FOR APPROVAL BY THE COUNCIL OF STATE. IN VIEW OF THE PUBLIC ENDORSEMENT OF THE MEASURE BY THE ARMED FORCES MOVEMENT (AFM), WHICH DOMINATES THE COUNCIL OF STATE, NO FURTHER SUBSTANTIVE CHANGES ARE EXPECTED BEFORE PROMULGATION.

3. SOCIALIST PARTY LEADER MARIO SOARES ANNOUNCED THAT LEADERSHIP OF SOCIALIST PARTY WILL DECIDE ON JANUARY 26 WHETHER TO REMAIN IN GOVERNING COALITION. HE AGAIN STATED SOCIALISTS ARE OPPOSED TO A "UNITARY LABOR MOVEMENT AND EVERYTHING THAT LIMITS CIVIL LIBERTIES." ASKED WHETHER THE COMMUNISTS HAD INSPIRED AFM SUPPORT FOR AUNITARY LABOR MOVEMENT OR THE OTHER WAY AROUND, SOARES REPLIED THAT THE AFM HAS RECENTLY REAFFIRMED THAT IT IS NON-PARTISAN AND INDEPENDENT OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY. HE ADDED THAT THE AFM HAS ALSO RESTATED THAT NATIONAL ELECTIONS SHOULD TAKE PLACE IN MARCH WHILE THE COMMUNISTS AND THEIR FELLOW-TRAVELLERS ARE OPPOSING THE HOLDING OF ELECTIONS.

4. A TELEVISION DEBATE ON THE LABOR LAW, TO INCLUDE PARTICIPATION BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR LABOR CARLOS CARVALHAS, REPRESENTATIVES OF THE THREE COALITION POLITICAL PARTIES, INTERSINDICAL, AND UNION LEADERS, WAS CANCELLED ON JANUARY 21 BY PRIME MINISTER VASCO GONCALVES. CANCELLATION OCCURRED AFTER COMMUNIST PARTY AND CARVALHAS DECLINED TO PARTICIPATE. ACTION BY PRIME MINISTER IS LOCALLY INTERPRETED AS FURTHER INDICATION OF PRIME MINISTER'S OWN POLITICAL INCLINATIONS.

5. COMMENT: ANNOUNCED MOVE BY SOCIALISTS TO CONSIDER LEAVING GOVERNING COALITION IS BASED ON THEIR BELIEF THAT AFM COULD NOT AFFORD TO HAVE EITHER OF THE TWO MODERATE PARTIES-- THE SOCIALISTS AND THE PPD-- LEAVE THE GOVERNMENT, THUS LEAVING ONLY THE COMMUNISTS ALIGNED WITH THE AFM. SOCIALIST THREAT IS SEEN THEN PRIMARILY AS A MEANS OF KEEPING PRESSURE ON AFM TO MAINTAIN A MORE NEUTRAL POLITICAL ORIENTATION.
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